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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 2894
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SUBJECT: WESTERN SAHARA: GOM CLAIMS IT'S NOT STALLING ON
UN HUMAN RIGHTS VISIT

REF: RABAT 637

Classified By: Pol/C Tim Lenderking for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Following up on SRSB Bastagli's April 6 comment that Morocco had turned off a third attempted visit to the Western Sahara by the UN High Commission for Human Rights (reftel), Polcouns called MFA Director for UN Affairs Nasser Bourita the afternoon of April 13 to get the official Moroccan perspective on the visit, which according to MINURSO was slated for March 29. Bourita said Morocco's position on the visit was clear and had been conveyed to the UNHRC on several occasions, most recently in a letter from FM Benaissa to UNHRC Commissioner Arbour on April 4. The GOM agreed to the principles of the visit and was ready to receive the mission. The GOM understood and accepted that the UNHRC delegation would visit four locales - Rabat, Laayoune, Tindouf, and Algiers - to assess human rights issues concerning the Western Sahara conflict.

¶2. (C) Bourita said the issue for the GOM at this stage was that the Moroccans had come to learn that the delegation's stop in Algiers was an exchange of views during a dinner - nothing more. No other meetings or activities were scheduled. The GOM believed that the meetings in each stop should follow the same format; an exchange of views over dinner would not allow for the kind of serious treatment of the issue that the GOM envisioned and that the GOM would be offering for its part. Bourita said the Moroccans had a number of files on human rights violations perpetrated by the Algerians which they intended to share with the UNHRC. Such files could not be treated seriously during a dinner; Morocco would want to raise rights violations by the Algerian military, for example. In Rabat, the delegation had requested meetings with the MFA, MOD, MOJ, and MOI. There was an imbalance in what was being asked of the two sides; Morocco was prepared to arrange everything the delegation requested, but the Algiers visit was clearly intended to be non-substantive. Morocco would seek to present some facts from the conflict, and include testimony from ex-POWs, NGOs, and others. A dinner format did a disservice to the many people who suffered at the hands of the Algerians during the years of the conflict.

¶3. (C) Polcouns (having in mind Sahrawi dissidents such as Mohamed Dadach and Mohamed Afari and others) asked whether the UNHRC had requested to meet particular individuals in the

Western Sahara. Bourita said no, there were requests rather for specific NGOs and ministries. None of this posed a problem for the GOM, Bourita emphasized. The GOM was pursuing the visit in a "very constructive" spirit, he insisted. Reading from FM Benaissa's April 6 letter to UNHRC Commissioner Arbour, Bourita said Morocco "reaffirms its agreement with the modalities of the HRC visit and has instructed its mission in Geneva to work with the HRC;" however, Bourita continued reading, "an exchange of views is not the mandate of the Commission."

14. (C) Bourita closed by saying he understood that Polisario President Abdelaziz was blaming Morocco for canceling the UNHRC visit on three occasions. "We hope the reality will be reflected in the UNSYG's report," Bourita said. With the March visit now off, the GOM was hoping to reschedule the visit to early May, Bourita said. Polcouns responded that there was international interest in the human rights situation in the Western Sahara, noted Morocco had nothing to gain by appearing to be obstructionist, and hoped the variables could be worked out to get the visit back on track.

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